THE BREAKING POINT

Last month, in the splendiferous Grand Palace of the Kremlin where the Soviet leadership was throwing a lavish caviar-champagne reception for President Nixon, his press and White House entourage, and the entire diplomatic corps in Moscow, Intelligence Report encountered Dr. Walter Tkach, Mr. Nixon's ruggedly handsome physician who is charged with keeping the Chief Executive in fighting fettle -- no easy job these days.

After discussing Mr. Nixon's widely publicized case of left-leg phlebitis, Dr. Tkach was asked about the President's mental health.

Said Tkach: "I don't know of any man who's been under more stress and strain than the President. Day after day, week after week for more than a year now he's been subjected to almost unbearable criticism and pressure. But he's a strong man, a determined man, a tenacious man, and he's holding on. He is one helluva fighter.

"I'll tell you this," Tkach volunteered. "If I had to face what he's had to face, if I had to endure what he's had to endure, I would have caved in after two weeks.

"I don't know what the President's breaking point is," he added. "Every man has one. But his is certainly higher than almost anyone else's I can think of. The trouble with a breaking point is that it's difficult to tell when a man is approaching it. Usually we can assess a man's breaking point only in retrospect. Then, of course, it's too late, because he's already broken."